

Meet Paul LaRoche, founder of the band Brulé. Paul was adopted at birth by a Caucasian couple and grew up in Worthington, Minnesota. He first learned to play the accordion, then switched to piano and organ. By high school, Paul played in a rock band that performed all around Minnesota and Iowa. He went on to perform in many more bands but dropped out in 1989 to work in civil engineering.

In 1993, after the death of both adoptive parents, Paul learned of his heritage as a member of the Lower Brulé Sioux Tribe of South Dakota. He, his wife and two children chose to move from Minneapolis to the Lower Brulé Sioux Indian Reservation in central South Dakota to be with his biological family. Paul started composing and performing again, but with new purpose.

“I am a product, I guess you would say, of two cultures, because of the way my life has gone. And rather than choose sides, I’ve tried to claim ownership of both. And really, it’s been my desire to want to bring those two worlds, or those two families, those two communities, a little closer together.”

Watch “Postcards: Brulé,” a 15-minute documentary about Paul LaRoche that aired before one of his concerts in Worthington. <https://youtu.be/V81C4quEmcY>

I can explain ways that music connects to cultural identity

Band notes:

- Paul plays electric keyboards and is the songwriter and producer of the band.
- Paul’s daughter, Nicole, plays flute. She plays a European flute and uses it to imitate the sound of the Native American wood flute.
- Paul’s son, Shane, plays lead guitar.
- Each traditional drum is respected and cared for in the traditional ways of the Native people.
- To the Lakota, Cloud People and Star People refer to the magical shapes made by the clouds and stars. Sometimes the shapes look like people or animals with human characteristics—they all have a living energy.

Watch an excerpt of “Star People” performed by Brulé. <https://youtu.be/fn8EJMeiv1A> (0:00-3:15)

Explain one way “Star People” connects to American popular music.

Explain two ways “Star People” connects to Paul’s Native American heritage.

1.

2.
